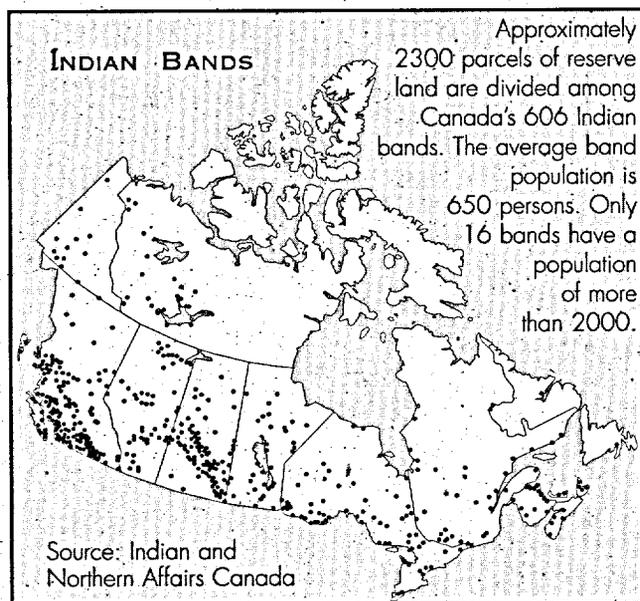


make legally binding agreements with Aboriginal groups to clarify the interests of each party:

One way that governments dealt with Indians on land matters was by signing treaties. Under these legally enforceable agreements, various Aboriginal groups exchanged undefined rights to specified areas of land for defined, written rights and benefits. Treaties were used by the Crown to clear lands of Aboriginal title so that settlement or resource development could proceed. Between 1763 and 1923, more than 50 land-cession treaties were signed with Indian groups in Canada.

A key provision of many of these treaties was that Indians would have their own land base, or reserve lands. For many groups, however, settlement in a permanent community was a new and alien concept. Curtailing their traditional hunting and fishing activities made them increasingly dependent on non-traditional sources of food and government support. As well, the



crowding of nomadic people into permanent communities often led to poor sanitary conditions that fostered the spread of disease.

### A PERIOD OF SUPPRESSION AND ASSIMILATION

The period between the mid-1800s and mid-1900s was one of severe decline for many Aboriginal people in Canada. The first *Indian Act* was passed in 1876, and for the next 75 years this legislation was used to regulate all aspects of life on reserves, leaving Indians with little or no control over even the most basic decisions. Amendments to the act in 1951 brought about major changes in the relative powers of the Government and Indian people. Nevertheless, many

of the *Indian Act's* restrictive provisions remain in place today, and are of concern to both the Government and Indian leaders.

As the social and economic conditions of Aboriginal people worsened, their dependence on non-Aboriginal governments grew. During this era, Aboriginal people suffered through long periods of neglect and mistreatment, interspersed with well-intentioned but misdirected efforts to assimilate them into non-Aboriginal society. During one period in Canadian history, Indian children were routinely removed from their families and placed in "residential" schools, often hundreds of kilometres away. Although these children received an education, they were forbidden to speak their native language or practise their native traditions and, in some cases, were the victims of abuse.

### THE ABORIGINAL RESURGENCE

Shortly after the end of World War II, Aboriginal leaders began to be heard. Arguing for equality rather than assimilation, they successfully pressed governments for action. By the mid-1960s, there were signs of improvements in the social and economic conditions of Aboriginal people. Health services were enhanced, and many more Aboriginal children had access to schooling, including secondary and post-secondary education. As well, by the end of the 1960s, Aboriginal people had obtained the same political and legal rights as other Canadian citizens, and an Aboriginal economy was developing.

### THE REALITY OF TODAY

*"Across Canada today, there's a sense of freedom amongst our people .... We are free because we have an opportunity to become part of this country."*

Jim Sinclair,  
President of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples  
August 13, 1994

Progress in addressing Aboriginal issues has been particularly evident over the past 20 years, as Indian, Inuit and M tis people have acquired a powerful political voice and widespread support among the Canadian public. Governments have also increasingly acknowledged their historical and contemporary obligations to Aboriginal people, and a number of key court decisions have substantiated Aboriginal positions.

Tangible evidence of the gains made to date can be found in virtually all socio-economic areas: